

Abstract

This studio based research is concerned with the concept of *Drawing with Light* through the development and use of carbon based photographic processes. The inspiration for this research is taken from William Henry Fox Talbot's work, in particular, his first photographic publication, the *Pencil of Nature*ⁱ. The concept of a *pencil of light* is investigated to show how light might be traced or dragged across a surface to form an image of itself. A hypothesis is developed for *Drawing with Light* that investigates the notion of light as a medium from which drawings can be traced, edited and erased by the inherent visual characteristics of visible and invisible light.

This research commenced with a literature review and preliminary practical studio investigations, which were informed by a review of historical and technical literature from the early history of photography. Visual and textual information relevant to *Drawing with Light*, were derived from national photographic archives and the *Correspondence of William Henry Fox Talbot* project web site. Technical support was sought from a corporation producing carbon tissue, and from an institution specialising in colloidal research. On completion of this literature review, I undertook extensive studio investigations that resulted in the completion of 6 projects. These projects consisted of a series of smaller studies of light and shadow that lead to a final hypothesis for *Drawing with Light*.

This research significantly contributes to the field of contemporary fine art. Carbon based photographic processes were first derived in the 19th century. Carbon and Gum Bichromate are developed here as tactile studio based processes. Carbon in particular is a versatile continuous tone transfer system that is permanent, stable and transferable to almost any surface. To my knowledge carbon has never been used as a material for tracing direct abstractions of light, nor as a pictorial element in an installation, which makes the basis of this research unique. On glass, carbon is a subtle yet affirmative medium that has extensive aesthetic possibilities, these range from the photograph to contemporary installations within an architectural or outdoor context.

ⁱ Talbot, William Henry Fox, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844).